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ABSTRACT

Based on the premise that determining the early childhood curriculum hinges to a certain extent on discovering the nature of children, this chapter explores the origins and practices of early childhood curriculum in the United States. The chapter reveals perceptions shifting over time regarding characterizations of young children's most essential natures; valued goals and expected forms of development and learning; projections of the roles teachers, materials, and peers play in development and learning; and understanding of the act of teaching itself. The chapter begins by considering the notion of educating the whole child, discussing the ideas of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel. Works are examined challenging the view of the child contained in the Froebelian kindergarten curriculum, including Dewey and progressive education, Montessori and education for social competence, and the child development perspective. The discussion of the period from 1950 through 1980 focuses on Erikson's ideas regarding development, Piaget's theory of intellectual development, implications of these theories for curriculum, the growth of Head Start, and the increasing focus of curriculum research on identifying which programs would produce the greatest IQ gains rather than helping to understanding the essential nature of the child. The chapter further discusses several new curriculum development movements appearing since 1980, including all-day kindergarten, the recognition of diversity, Vygotsky's theory, and the reconceptualization of the field. The chapter concludes by noting that the image of the whole child and arguments for the roles of process and play in promoting development and learning remain vital. (Contains 76 references.) (KB)

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CHAPTER 1

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Determining the Early Childhood Curriculum: The Evolution of Goals and Strategies Through Consonance and Controversy

LESLIE R. WILLIAMS

THE WORD *curriculum* evokes many images in the minds of teachers, administrators, and parents. For most early educators prepared in European and American traditions, though, *curriculum* has a single powerful association—the image of "the whole child." Consideration of what that phrase means to those who work with young children (children from birth to age 8) and how it came to have so particular a connotation reveals some of the distinctive characteristics of early education and explains what for other educators may be considered the idiosyncratic nature of the field's curriculum literature. In early childhood education, the curriculum and the whole child tend to be seen as inseparable.

Most early educators understand "the whole child" to mean the child's complete integration of intellectual (cognitive), emotional, social, and physical capabilities. Learning in any one of these domains must necessarily involve all the others. Effective teaching, as a consequence, must draw upon those inner connections, with recognition of the distinctive ways in which young children create or take in and utilize knowledge of the world around them.

The task of determining the early childhood curriculum, therefore, hinges to a certain extent on discovering the nature of children. What young children learn is at least partially dependent upon how they learn. As this concept has evolved, how children learn has also increasingly come to be seen in relation to a *context*, a broad social and cultural base

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for children's emerging knowledge, skills, feelings, and attitudes. Experience has taught early educators that young children thrive on acknowledgment and use of their unique capacities for learning and that they show themselves to be capable of strong performance in all areas of accomplishment when taught as unitary, integrated beings.

This chapter explores the origins and practices of early childhood curriculum in what are currently its most widespread forms in the United States. The story told here reveals perceptions shifting over time regarding characterizations of young children's most essential natures; valued goals and expected forms of development and learning; projections of the roles teachers, materials, and peers play in that development and learning; and understandings of the act of "teaching" itself when applied to work with young children. Tensions that have periodically arisen within the field have usually stemmed from lack of consonance among two or more of these elements in competing early childhood curricular systems. Consideration of historical and current controversies, therefore, can highlight the points at which early educators make implicit or explicit decisions to determine the general content and form of the curriculum they intend to enact.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

The idea of educating the whole child reflects a rich tradition of comprehensiveness that has characterized early education from its beginnings. This tradition arose as a response both to social conditions adversely affecting the lives of young children and to the moral, spiritual, idealistic, pragmatic, and eventually scientific (or "modern") streams of thought flowing through Western society over the past 200 years. At the current juncture, scientific responses to curriculum formulation are being challenged by increasing awareness of the influence of culture on children's development and learning and by the "postmodern" critique of the notion of development itself that may lead to still other iterations of early childhood curriculum.

Historian Philippe Ariès (1962) suggests that before the romantic period, children who reached the age of 6 or 7 years were viewed as miniature adults and thus were expected to learn in the same entirely language-based and formal mode used in adult education. The only classical distinctions made by both Plato (427–347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) were that before approximately the age of 7, young children's exposure to material such as mythic tales should be carefully censored to provide only the strictest training of character as a proper foundation for

learning, and that incorporation of physical exercise into the educational plan be considered essential in providing the healthy body needed to support a healthy mind. In a vein somewhat similar to early character training, preparation of young scholars in medieval Europe was expected to be grounded in spiritual disciplines, so that the developing mind would reflect the order of the Creation or divine intent. While these provisos implied the integration of the faculties of human learning, translating that assumption into curricula was not seen except in sporadic instances—for example, in the seventeenth century, Luther's incorporation of vocational instruction into courses of study and Comenius's use of pictures as concrete referents to vocabulary studied (Braun & Edwards, 1972; Comenius, 1896/1910; Weber, 1984). By and large, it appears that the teaching of young children proceeded through "telling," on the assumption that knowledge could be directly transmitted from teacher to child, that learning occurred through children's recognition of eternal truths or their memorization of what had been passed on, and that skills were acquired through practice.

Rousseau and the Natural Child

A clear demarcation in the image of the child came with the popularization of the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1788). In his educational treatise *Emile* (1762/1969), Rousseau departed from the view of children as being like adults and presented them as moving through a succession of stages, each of which had its own internal order and coherence (Gutek, 1972). Equally important was Rousseau's insistence that children learned not through the abstractions of the written word but through direct interaction with the natural physical environment. He took the extreme position that only the natural world provided guidance in this interactive process and that society corrupted children, tarnishing their innate nobility of spirit. He recommended that children be raised in situations where contact with nature could be frequent and prolonged, where children could play without social restraint until reaching the age of reason (approximately puberty). At that time, formal studies could commence without danger of distortion of the true nature of the child (Rousseau, 1762/1969). Now the conception of the role of the teacher changed from that of a transmitter passing on knowledge to that of a protector and shield who would deflect corrupting societal influences, thus enabling the inborn sequence of a child's development to unfold. The implied teaching strategy was a somewhat distanced, observational stance, coupled with occasional conversational tutorials focusing on un-

derstandings a child was acquiring through interaction with the natural world.

While Rousseau's main interest was in reforming society's total conception of education and he did not focus specifically on young children, his work is important to understanding the inner structures of most current forms of early childhood curricula because he anticipated several of the themes that characterize work in the field to this day. His awareness of the emergence of developmental stages and stage-related learning has already been mentioned. In addition, his presentation of learning as an interactive, sensorially based process and his recognition of play as a medium for learning were powerful intimations of the directions to be taken in future curriculum design.

Like all issues of import in education, however, conceptions of the roles of play and processes in learning, and their relationship to the idea of teaching the whole child, have evolved over time. Ensuing changes have been responsive to broad social patterns, needs, and priorities. In every era, new program designs and curricular formulations have revealed both unique and cumulative perceptions of the role of each of these in suiting curriculum content and teaching strategies to the distinctive characteristics of young children. Tracing the path of that evolution can contribute to our understanding of the fundamental questions behind curriculum research in early childhood education today.

Returning, therefore, to the predecessors of modern practice, we see that from the mid-eighteenth century onward, there was a clear line of development in the image of the whole child. Emphases on interactive processes and play became more and more apparent in the fabric of early childhood education, as each innovator passed insights to a new generation of persons serving, nurturing, and educating the young child.

Pestalozzi and the Observant Child

Rousseau's work deeply influenced the thinking of Johann Pestalozzi (1746–1827), an Italian-Swiss schoolteacher who founded one of the first European schools to acknowledge children's developmental characteristics. Pestalozzi was convinced of the profound effect of social environment on children. When his novel *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children* (1801/1915) was first published in 1801, he was promulgating the then-revolutionary notion of an intimate teaching connection between parents and their children. He assumed that children were the pliant recipients of parental instruction and were in danger of corruption by society if that teaching was not of the highest moral character.

The curriculum "Papa" Pestalozzi designed for his children equated

parental guidance and strong morality with the work ethic. The result was a high-intensity work training program that prepared children to face a rapidly changing economy. Manual dexterity was stressed as a survival skill in the newly emerging Industrial Revolution (Gutek, 1968).

The structure behind Pestalozzi's program was even more unconventional for its day than was its outward form. Pestalozzi saw the purpose of his work as the development of children's moral, physical, and intellectual powers. While the first two were fostered through the approach described above, intellectual growth was stimulated through *Anschauung*, a perceptual-ideational process through which concepts or clear ideas were formed. *Anschauung* involved three levels of operation. Most immediately, it represented the reception in the mind of direct sensory impressions from interaction with the external environment. One step removed from that was the formation of ideas by combining sense impressions with attention, or mental concentration, and arriving at concepts by association. At the third level of operation, mental ideas would appear without a concrete referent. *Anschauung* was developed in children through guided observation and representation of the natural world. Practice in recording the numbers and forms inherent in objects and the language associated with them ("naming," or classification) led to refinement of mental capacity and its application in the physical and moral realms. Thus the whole person was educated and became a competent and coping human being (Gutek, 1968).

A fascinating part of this system was Pestalozzi's use of older, more competent children as tutors of younger ones. Faced with large numbers of students and limited financial resources, he himself taught a group of child tutors to guide younger children in exercises of collecting, drawing, and talking about (classifying), as well as doing mathematical analyses of, objects from the natural environment—procedures he described at several points in his writings (Green, 1912). One might argue that in doing so, Pestalozzi was one of the first educators to introduce variation in teaching strategy into the foundations of early childhood professional practice.

In a review of teaching strategies or approaches used to teach young children, Lay-Dopyera and Dopyera (1992) point out that certain modes of teaching have come to be so associated with particular theoretical orientations regarding child development and learning that practitioners holding those views may not be aware of them as distinctive, and thus do not question either their use or their efficacy. In spite of this tendency, researchers over the past several decades have identified and studied specific strategies, among them promotion of positive teacher–child relationships, use of classroom management procedures, teacher–child dialogue

strategies (including giving descriptive feedback; providing reinforcement for desired behaviors; coaching, prompting, and giving suggestions; and modeling), and strategies for group lessons (such as direct instruction, deductive lessons with advanced organizers, inductive lessons for concept attainment, cooperative learning, modeling lessons, problem discussion lessons, "wonderful idea" lessons, and play–debrief–replay lessons).

In Pestalozzi's work, there was originally much emphasis on the traditional technique of *direct instruction*, whereby curriculum content was presented in verbal and written form, commonly followed by student recitation. Here, Lay-Dopyera and Dopyera note, "the student's role is to learn the right response," while the teacher's role is to "tell the pupils whether they are right or wrong and to carefully arrange the presentation so that they will be right most of the time" (p. 29).

As Pestalozzi's class grew in size, however, and as he continued to refine his pedagogy over time, he introduced new elements into his strategies. Analysis of his descriptions suggests that he *modeled* his "object lessons," that is, he consciously enacted the procedures of observation that he wanted the children to imitate, a technique that in recent times has been shown to be powerful in inducing desired behaviors (Bandura, 1973, cited in Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1992; Bandura & Walters, 1963).

It may also be inferred from his several articulations of *Anschauung* that Pestalozzi used an early form of *deductive lessons with advance organizers*. In this strategy, children are first provided with a general description of the features being sought (Ausubel, 1963, 1968, cited in Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1992), as in Pestalozzi's "language, form, and number," and then encouraged to examine objects for those features, moving from the simple to the more complex applications of the concept (Schwadener & Lawton, 1978, cited in Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1992).

Clearly foundational to all of these strategic efforts, though, was Pestalozzi's establishment of an emotional climate that promoted a loving trust between himself and his students (Gutek, 1968). In doing this, he anticipated the importance of the *positive teacher–child relationships* much later investigated by Thompson (1944, cited by Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1992) and further examined by Tzelepis, Giblin, and Agronow (1983) and Shipman (1976; both studies cited by Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1992), among others. Repeatedly, such studies have shown relationships between positive teacher regard and children's improved or heightened performance. Pestalozzi appears to have known the power of such relationships, and his work in this sphere set a much-emulated precedent for the curriculum designers who followed him. Without question, it made a profound impression on Friedrich Froebel and the several generations of early childhood educators who subsequently promoted Froebel's work.

Froebel and the Child as Divine Reflection

Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852) studied with Pestalozzi; but he, designing a curriculum in 1837, 50 years after Pestalozzi's first work, found his teacher's vision of the child inadequate to capture the spirit of the new age. He molded and changed that vision to encompass "self-actualization" as a legitimate goal of early childhood education. Young children, said Froebel, arrive on this earth with an impressive repertoire of inborn knowledge and skills. The role of the teacher was to bring these capabilities to fruition by making children consciously aware of and able to use all that they know.

Froebel created a curriculum that was fascinating both in its complexity and in its inherent appeal to the children of his day. It consisted of a carefully sequenced set of manipulative materials known as the Gifts, complemented by an equally carefully sequenced set of handwork projects called the Occupations. The Gifts and Occupations together were designed to illustrate fundamental mathematical principles that Froebel believed were part of the creative human spirit and that echoed essential workings of the cosmos, or the mind of God (Froebel, 1826/1887).

Froebel is generally considered the founder of early childhood education not only because he was the first to design a curriculum specifically for young children (Pestalozzi's work encompassed the range from early childhood through adolescence) but also because he introduced play as a major medium for instruction. For the first time, children "played" in school, that is, used manipulatives specially designed to teach concepts and skills. Formal games, music, art, and outdoor activities (such as gardening and care of pets) were integrated into the daily program to supplement the use of the Gifts and the Occupations.

Froebel's notion of "play" was substantially different from modern conceptions. He saw play as a teacher-directed process, largely imitative in nature and revolving around predetermined content. But he also understood play to be a form of "creative self-activity," expressing children's emerging capabilities and reflecting their particular way of learning (Froebel, 1826/1887).

Froebel's work turned the attention of educators to the importance of specially designed teaching materials in promoting particular kinds of learning in young children. Additionally, while continuing to emphasize a central role for the teacher as a verbal mediator of children's activity, Froebel, like Pestalozzi, shifted attention away from direct instruction to several types of *teacher–child dialogue strategies*. Children did follow teacher direction in use of the materials, and they often modeled on the teacher's manipulations of the Gifts and Occupations. Teachers were expected,

however, to maintain a flow of classroom talk with children that included such dimensions as *coaching, prompting,* and *giving suggestions,* as well as *asking questions,* all in the context of group activity. In recent years, the importance of the role of the teacher as a key player in classroom talk has been reaffirmed in the work of such researchers as Almy, Monighan, Scales, and Van Hoorn (1984) and Katz and Chard (1989; both studies cited in Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1992). While work over the past several decades in this area has most commonly focused on the effects of dialogic strategies on the work of underachieving or "disadvantaged" children (as in Christie, 1982; Feitelson & Ross, 1973; Rosen, 1974; and Smilansky, 1968; all cited in Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1992), a more recent review influenced by the research of Lev Vygotsky (Bodrova & Leong, 1996) has pointed to the effectiveness of such uses of language as a tool for the development of all children.

Other teaching strategies prominent in Froebel's curriculum were similar to those used by Pestalozzi—*modeling,* as previously noted, and *deductive lessons with advance organizers.* Teachers were expected to be warm and accepting and to develop strong, caring bonds with the children they taught. This emphasis on *the teacher–child relationship* continued to be a major characteristic of early childhood curriculum through the 1960s, and it has remained a feature to the present day.

FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Froebel's mystical formulation dominated curriculum design in early childhood education for 50 years. In the 1890s, however, a new generation of persons concerned with the well-being of young children and their families began to challenge the view of the child contained in the Froebelian kindergarten curriculum.

Dewey and Progressive Education

While not rejecting the picture of children as innately creative beings, the Progressive followers of John Dewey reached backward in time to reclaim some of Pestalozzi's understanding of learning through direct experience with the natural world, and forward into the new century to envision children as builders of a new social order—a democratic society. Progressive educators found the highly defined and teacher-directed Froebelian curriculum to be too removed from the challenges and problems of daily living. Instead, they suggested, a curriculum for young children should

be designed to meet the circumstances children faced as members of a group living in a modern world (Dewey, 1944/1966).

Children were thus seen as social beings, and the curriculum became a flexible grouping of activities to promote social problem-solving processes largely within the realm of social studies. Examples of such activities were joint efforts in the preparation of food for lunch or small-group work on representation in the classroom of a familiar community institution such as the local grocery store. Through such activities, children were expected to develop a sense of mutual responsibility and an understanding of at least some of the workings of the society in which they lived (Dewey, 1902).

New conceptions of play and the use of process in teaching and learning were emerging. The nature of children as learners was being seen in relation to experience (Dewey, 1938/1963). This meant connection with real-life activities that tended to integrate subject areas and require coordination of socioemotional, psychomotor, and cognitive responses from children. Such responses frequently took the form of sociodramatic play, in which the children reenacted what they had observed or directly experienced, often adding new dimensions to the scene in ways that revealed the processes behind their growing understanding.

Not surprisingly with this change in basic curriculum orientation, new teaching strategies began to be developed that were consonant with the aims for children's development and learning. Of particular interest was use of various forms of *cooperative learning*. Because the children were working on activities that tended to carry on over several days or even weeks, the development and maintenance of the work needed several children to be engaged with it at one time; and children and teachers together needed to identify cooperative roles and enable each other to carry them out. At later points in early childhood curriculum development, the cooperative strategies begun in the Progressive context were extended further by educators interested in fostering the social integration of young children with special needs into "general" education classrooms (K. A. Miller, 1989, cited in Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1992) or in providing opportunities for comparison and contrast of ideas as part of the exercise of emerging cognitive capabilities in young children (Kohlberg & Lickona, 1987, cited in Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1992).

An equally prominent strategy was incorporation of *problem discussion lessons*. Using as a point of focus social problems that arose in the process of classroom activities, teachers and children together would identify the issues, discuss their ramifications, and pose possible solutions (Cuffaro, 1995). As noted by Lay-Dopyera and Dopyera (1992), "the goal is not to teach the 'right' or 'best' answer but to develop children's awareness of

the need for solutions and to develop a repertoire of viable possibilities in problem situations" (p. 32). These discussions would often lead to new curriculum ideas that could be jointly developed by both teachers and children.

Montessori and Education for Social Competence

As the Progressive movement was gathering momentum in the United States, Maria Montessori in Italy was transforming her observations of the nature of the whole child into another process-oriented curriculum. Like Dewey, Montessori was keenly aware of societal demands on children. Instead of looking at the functioning of children in groups, however, she focused on the promotion of social competence in individuals. She saw children as very sensitive to sensorial stimulation, "capable of sustaining mental concentration when genuinely interested in their work," loving cleanliness and order, "preferring work to play and didactic materials to toys, and having a deep sense of personal dignity" (Standing, 1962, pp. 40–43). Consequently, she designed her curriculum to foster independence in self-care and individual responsibility for one's own learning. Children worked individually or with self-chosen companions, practicing skills on specially made, self-corrective manipulative materials that provided immediate feedback on their accomplishment.

Montessori had a deep understanding of learning as process. Her curriculum was organized around several "periods" in the child's development, each of which had its particular requirements for interaction with the environment. Assuming a continuum between refinement of the senses and broader intellectual functioning, she devised procedures and didactic materials that were responsive to children's evolving learning characteristics. During the period of the "absorbent mind" (birth to age 6), and most especially in the substage of greatest sensitivity and receptivity (3 to 6 years), she engaged the children in exercises of "practical life" and sense training. Practical life work emphasized cleanliness, self-care, and care and maintenance of the learning environment. Work in sense training promoted fine powers of sensory discrimination and developed readiness for the writing, reading, and other academic learnings that followed in the primary grades (Montessori, 1912/1964).

All of the exercises were process-oriented. While the didactic materials were designed to achieve specific outcomes (such as the ability to order cylinders from largest to smallest in height), they were also made to encourage the repetition of tasks, which in Montessori's view typically precedes and follows mastery in young children. Thus, while specific accomplishment was important, how children achieved mastery and con-

tinuing opportunity to demonstrate mastery were seen to be even more significant to their emerging competence.

Not only were Montessori's curricular aims and understandings of the essential nature of children a departure from conceptualizations among Progressive educators, but her teaching strategies also posed interesting differences. Having built upon a tradition of interaction with materials as the activity leading intellectual development, she offered a view of the adult in the classroom as a "directress" rather than a teacher in the conventional sense of that term. Adults were to observe children's behavior and to facilitate children's choices of increasingly complex materials as the children demonstrated their acquisition of the requisite skills for each one. Montessori did not believe one should praise children for their accomplishments, but she did anticipate the strategy of *giving descriptive feedback* by noting exactly what children had accomplished with the materials when children called adults' attention to what they had done. Unlike the later work done in investigation of this strategy (Anker, Foster, McLane, Sokel, & Weissbourd, 1974; Hess & Shipman, 1965; both cited in Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1992), however, Montessori used language sparingly to amplify the interactions with materials, rather than as a vehicle for elaborating concept development. Her concentrated use of child observation as a basis for curriculum refinement, on the other hand, did parallel a strategy that was gaining strength in the Child Study Movement in the United States.

The Child Development Perspective

Simultaneously with Dewey's and Montessori's separate efforts, the American Child Study Movement, under the leadership of G. Stanley Hall (1844–1924), was starting to influence early childhood practice. Observations of children's behavior in a variety of contexts began yielding powerful data that, in turn, were causing curriculum makers to rethink what were appropriate learning experiences for young children (Kessen, 1965; Weber, 1984). The complexity of "the whole child" was beginning to reveal itself and to require increasingly sensitive applications of integrated approaches to teaching and learning.

As the century advanced, the conception of the child as a social being was expanding to include an accounting of the individual child's physical and psychological growth patterns. From the 1920s through the 1950s, the attention of early educators focused successively on children's social functioning, physical development and maturational milestones, emotional health, and, finally, underlying cognitive skills that signaled stage-appropriate mental functioning. Drawing on the work of Gesell and Ilg,

Erikson, and Piaget, among others, early childhood educators in the late 1950s generally espoused what came to be known as the "child development" point of view (Braun & Edwards, 1972; Weber, 1984).

Notable during this 30-year period was the work of such finely tuned educators as Susan Isaacs in Britain and Harriet Johnson, Caroline Pratt, and Lucy Sprague Mitchell in the United States. By mid-century, the names of Lawrence Frank, Daniel Prescott, Arthur Jersild, and James L. Hymes had been added to the list (Weber, 1984). While these early childhood advocates each had a distinct point of view, they all emphasized the centrality of process, and play as an expression of process, in the growth, development, and education of young children. Teaching strategies utilized by early educators during this period continued in the vein of those previously described.

THIRTY YEARS OF GROWTH: 1950–1980

As understanding of the processes of children's learning became more refined through extended child observation, curriculum content was increasingly linked with the everyday occurrences of children's lives. This was so partly because of the continuing influence of Dewey's thinking on classroom practice and partly because there was new theoretical support for the power of such content from two giants in the field of child development, Erik Erikson (1902–1994) and Jean Piaget (1896–1980). Mentioned above in the context of changing emphases in early childhood education, the work of these two researchers requires particular attention because of the depth and breadth of their influence on curriculum design to the present day.

Erikson and Development Through Conflict Resolution

As a young teacher raised in Europe, Erik Erikson came under the tutelage of Anna Freud, the daughter of the founder of the psychodynamic school of psychology, Sigmund Freud. Prepared by her for work in child therapy, he soon became intrigued by the interactions he discerned between the course of psychosexual development in young children as described in classic psychodynamic literature and the sociocultural milieu in which children were being raised.

Erikson accepted the point of departure of psychodynamic thought—that the essential nature of human beings is instinctual and manifests itself in the realm of feeling and emotion. Cognition arises from unfulfilled desire, as a secondary characteristic of human nature. He under-

stood socioemotional development as proceeding through the resolution of a series of conflicts, each of which addresses a fundamental issue of the human psyche. Proceeding from trust versus mistrust, to autonomy versus shame, to initiative versus guilt, and beyond through all eight distinctive "ages of man," children (and adults) strive to achieve integration and maintain balance in the context of the particular demands their society places upon them (Erikson, 1950/1963).

Young children, said Erikson, most commonly work through their current conflicts by reconstructing them in symbolic play. For curriculum developers influenced by Erikson's formulation, play centering on day-to-day events and familiar objects became a critical element in early childhood programs. It provided an arena for children's coming to terms with their existential dilemmas and encouraged cognition through channeling of childhood fantasy.

Piaget and the Child's Construction of Knowledge

Piaget's theory of intellectual development gave a different but equally potent justification for including play in the early childhood curriculum. Piaget concluded that the essential nature of human beings was their power to construct knowledge through adaptation to the environment. From birth, children engage in the reciprocal acts of "assimilation" and "accommodation" in order to form, extend, and expand the structures of their minds. In assimilation, children match information, concepts, and skills arising from interaction with the environment and with previously formed mental structures. Accommodation, on the other hand, requires that the structures be modified in order to make sense of the new information or concepts, or to represent new skills (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969).

These complementary processes are fueled by children's direct activity, said Piaget. Play especially exercises the assimilation process, using action and frequently language as proving grounds for newly acquired ideas. As children proceed through the four periods of intellectual development (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational) described by Piaget, play assumes a variety of forms; and within any one period, it can have multiple functions. Sensorimotor play, for example, generally revolves around practicing physical skills acquired through use of the five senses. However, it can also be used as a medium for establishing social relationships. During the preoperational period, play might be used symbolically or constructively to solidify physical knowledge of one's surroundings, to practice solving problems in the adult world, or to create a microsociety in which to try out new capabilities or to refine social interactions (Piaget, 1962).

Implications for Curriculum

Early childhood program designers who accepted Erikson's and Piaget's descriptions of child development found that they could interpret the work of the two theorists according to their own instructional leanings. Erikson and Piaget themselves did not transform their theories into specifications for classroom practice. Curriculum makers, therefore, were free to draw implications leading to a variety of approaches to addressing the socioemotional and cognitive characteristics of young children. The one common feature of these approaches was that abundant malleable and manipulable materials and ample time for the children to interact directly with them were seen as vital spurs to the children's continued cognitive development.

By the early 1960s, therefore, the concept of teaching the whole child through a process orientation and incorporating play experiences into the curriculum was well established. Many "child development" programs reflected a psychodynamic (Freudian, Eriksonian) or, less frequently, a Piagetian point of view that stressed the interconnection of experiences and the roles of emotion, cognition, and maturation in the promotion of learning. Other programs remained more closely aligned to the earlier Deweyan point of view or to the "readiness" rationale stemming from child study. In spite of the variety of theoretical underpinnings, however, classroom practice tended to have common characteristics.

Typically, early childhood classrooms were arranged into "interest centers" such as the block corner, library, art area, family or sociodramatic play corner, and sand/water areas. Daily schedules incorporated both child-initiated and teacher-directed work periods. The areas of the room were stocked with a range of malleable and manipulable materials used, according to the orientation of the program, to promote social interaction, skill/concept development, or a combination of the two. The curriculum was derived from teachers' observations of the children's interests and developmental needs, from the possibilities presented by the learning materials themselves, and from awareness of the school content that would follow in the first grade. Again, the teaching strategies used were those that have been previously described.

Head Start

At this time (approximately 1959–1963) the federal government intervened in early childhood education in ways that altered the course of curriculum development for the next 15 years. Distressed by descriptions

of the depressed physical and intellectual condition of the nation's growing number of children living in poverty, the United States Office of Child Development (now the Administration for Children, Youth and Families) initiated a new federally funded early childhood program—Project Head Start.

Head Start originally espoused the child development tradition in its early learning centers. The educational program was designed around a flexible schedule of child-initiated play and group-learning experiences, which were generally aimed at connecting the three domains of learning. The purpose of the program was to enable each child to develop as fully as possible all facets of his or her "being," while being prepared for the social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and physical demands of the first grade.

The public school expected that children would come to the first grade with a firm command not only of social behavior that would enable them to work effectively in a classroom, but also of premath, prereading, and other "readiness" skills. The very name "Head Start" implied such a preparation. The public school's conception of curriculum at that time was, generally speaking, not developmental in nature. It was focused instead on the acquisition of specific content (the facts or substance of math, science, language, literature, and so forth). If children came to the first grade for some reason not ready (in the sense of not having had initial exposure to that content, or not having acquired particular "learning how to learn" skills that met the school's expectations), they were considered to be "disadvantaged."

Head Start's mission was to ensure that children would not fail. Consequently, there were new initiatives among Head Start curriculum makers. Strongly influenced by learning theorists and analysts of school content, some of the curriculum developers in experimental projects turned away from the child development approach to return to direct instruction in a variety of readiness skills, inclusion of a focus on prereading and premath content, and utilization of a high proportion of teacher direction in each day's work.

In some of the innovative curriculum models, the interest centers characterizing the early childhood classroom disappeared. They were replaced by high-intensity, small-group interactions; by practice with workbook exercises; or by other forms of focus on behavioral sequences geared to the acquisition of skills and attitudes related to upcoming school experiences (Evans, 1975). Teaching strategies subsequently shifted from a more generalized concern with the teacher–child relationship to articulation of *classroom management* procedures and techniques largely derived from behavioral theories of learning.

Lay-Dopyera and Dopyera (1992) describe classroom management as "teacher behavior aimed at keeping children engaged appropriately and reducing the likelihood of [children's] behavior that requires the teacher to give children negative feedback" (p. 21). Studies in the effectiveness of teachers using such strategies in work with young children have focused on the need for clarity in setting expectations for children's behavior, explicit orientation of the children to the classroom (including attention to routines such as toileting and eating), arrangement of classroom space to facilitate particular activities and protect personal possessions, provision of specific feedback about children's performance, and mobility of the teacher in the classrooms that enables redirection of the children's behavior whenever seen as necessary (Anderson, Evertson, & Emmer, 1979; Brophy & Evertson, 1976; Tzelepis et al., 1983; all cited in Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1992).

Another strategy prominent in these programs was use of *behavioral reinforcement*. Here the focus lay on identifying desired behaviors in children (including goals for learning) and providing positive consequences for their demonstration. Teachers introduced to behavioral theory (Bijou & Baer, 1978; Skinner, 1974; both cited in Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1992) became conscious of the power of social gestures of approval (such as smiles, handshakes, or positive comment) and material tokens of approval (such as stickers, food, or the opportunity to play with certain toys) and learned to use these to increase the incidence of performance of desired behaviors among the children.

In other new curriculum models that made up Head Start's "planned variations," the familiar interest centers remained in the classroom but were used in new ways to promote school-related skills and attitudes, and behavioral teaching strategies similar to those described above were commonly used. Some of the planned variations did, however, return to problem-solving strategies previously popularized in Progressive classrooms or developed strategies that elicited the engagement of particular kinds of cognitive processes, such as use of *inductive lessons for concept attainment* or *"wonderful idea"* lessons. In the former, strategies developed by Bruner, Goodnow, and Austin (1956) that focused on comparison and contrast of exemplars and nonexemplars of a concept were used to expand and elaborate the children's funds of knowledge and conceptual skills. In the latter, work done by Eleanor Duckworth (1972, as reported by Meek, 1991) was used in introduction of activities to young children that caused them to wonder and question what they were observing. Their cognitive engagement was then furthered through eliciting comments from them and through subsequent building of more and more differentiated conceptual systems as the children learned from each other's observations. Whatever the case, children who entered the programs

were observed or assessed to see what their needs were—that is, where they were lacking skills—and learning experiences were designed to develop those skills. While there were some notable exceptions in program design, many of the recommended learning activities encouraged use of materials commonly found in public school kindergartens and first grades, such as felt circles, squares, and triangles to teach shapes, and monthly calendars to teach passage of time.

Curriculum Research

Between 1967 and 1973, in response to some of the trends in Head Start, curriculum research in early childhood education in general also began to take a particular turn. Instead of focusing so heavily on defining and understanding the essential nature of the child as a learner, psychologists and early childhood educators began to explore which program designs would yield the greatest gains in the children's performance on standardized IQ and readiness tests. Some studies indicated that children did equally well in demonstration or experimental programs that were radically different from one another, provided that certain parameters such as parent involvement and consistent teacher planning were present (Weikart, 1969). Other studies indicated that academically based programs that made strong use of direct instruction did result in higher scores on standardized tests (L. Miller & Dyer, 1975), but that these scores were not generally maintained beyond third grade without follow-up intervention in the public school (Gray, Ramsey, & Klaus, 1982; L. Miller & Dyer, 1975).

The results of that wave of research raised a number of interesting questions. What were the factors that accounted for some measure of success with some children but not with others in the same classroom? Which programs would be best for children with particular sets of characteristics (Smith & Bissell, 1970)? What were the contextual variables (such as focus on the children's direct experiences and incorporation of culturally derived content into the curriculum) that might account for heightened performance in given situations (Juarez & Associates, 1982)? These and other concerns surfaced throughout the 1970s, refocusing attention on the complexity of the whole child and the many dimensions involved in teaching young children.

DEBATES AT THE END OF THE CENTURY

In the two decades spanning the beginning of the 1980s to the end of the 1990s, several new curriculum development movements appeared. These

movements heightened a sense of controversy that had become submerged during the era of heavy federal funding for early childhood programs stressing IQ gains and attention to school-related achievement. Many early educators began to voice concern about what they took to be a loss of focus on children's developmental patterns and urged recognition and reestablishment of child development theory as foundational for early childhood curriculum. Others felt that child development theory was an insufficient or even erroneous base for early childhood curriculum development. The resulting debates have had several different points of focus and have led directly to present-day generation of new variations in early childhood curriculum. The first wave of "new" debate, however, actually returned the attention of early educators to perennial issues in the field—namely, the proper curriculum content and teaching strategies for kindergarten programs.

The All-Day Kindergarten Movement

The most recent iteration of the kindergarten debate arose in response to a growing nationwide initiative to provide all-day kindergartens in public schools. Unlike the Head Start program, full-day kindergartens would be designed to address the needs of all children attending public school, regardless of socioeconomic status. While promotion of a longer kindergarten day has been fueled by a variety of political, social, economic, and educational rationales, the net result has been a reassessment of the needs and responses of 5–year-olds in such extended programs.

Particularly prominent in this movement has been renewed interest in the teaching of traditional school skills and subject areas in kindergarten programs. This interest has in fact sparked lively exchanges between those who feel that formal, academic skills such as beginning reading and mathematical computation should be taught in kindergarten, and those who feel that acquisition of academic skills is not a "developmentally appropriate" goal for kindergartners.

The former group believes that school skills and subjects should be presented as soon as possible to young children so that academic achievement can be accelerated. This point of view assumes that young children learn in fundamentally the same ways that older children do and that the key to their eventual proficiency in the use of basic skills and acquisition of subject matter is "time on task." The latter group, on the other hand, argues that more important than promoting facility with use of symbols and accumulation of facts is developing young children's underlying thinking processes—the foundations for problem solving and critical thinking that can be applied later to traditional academic learning. The

advocates for providing these "foundations" point out that the elements of all the subject and skill areas can be integrated into learning activities designed to both respond to and promote young children's direct engagement with the world around them. Because of children's developmental characteristics, this group argues, children can best grasp such content when it is highlighted in common events of interest and when the material is presented in ways that draw upon children's social, emotional, and psychomotor as well as cognitive responses. Incorporation of play into early childhood programs, the developmentalists maintain, should not be abandoned in favor of increased direct instruction, because play serves the function of relating skills and subject matter or content to the children's particular ways of knowing.

The debate between the two opposing camps had become so pronounced by the mid-1980s that the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, the largest professional association of early childhood educators in the United States) decided in 1986 that it should produce a policy paper defining its position on the issue. The NAEYC statement (Bredekamp, 1987), commonly known as the DAP (developmentally appropriate practice) guidelines, rapidly became a major rallying point for the developmentalists. At the same time, it sparked a new debate.

Recognizing Diversity

The new debate centered on what was meant by "appropriateness" and by "development" in the NAEYC statement advocating developmentally appropriate practice. In part, the new conversation had been framed by work already underway in the area of multicultural early childhood practice. During the early 1980s a multicultural stream of early childhood curriculum development had begun to make its presence felt. Linked with earlier movements addressing intergroup relationships and promoting ethnic studies, as well as with needs and controversies highlighted in bilingual educational settings, initial designs for multicultural early childhood curricula had appeared by 1979 through a federal funding initiative of the Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF, Head Start Strategy for Spanish-Speaking Children). Within a short period of time, the four curricula originally funded by ACYF had been published (Cox, Macauley, & Ramirez, 1982; Hanes, Flores, Rosario, & Weikart, 1979; Williams, De Gaetano, Harrington, & Sutherland, 1985; Zamora, 1985); and these were joined by work done under other auspices (Chud & Fahlman, 1985; Kendall, 1983/1996; King, Chipman, & Cruz-Janzen, 1994; Ramsey, 1987; Ramsey, Vold, & Williams, 1989; York, 1991). By the 1990s,

the concept of multicultural education had broadened to working with issues of diversity in all of its forms (De Gaetano, Williams, & Volk, 1998; Miller-Lachmann & Taylor, 1995; Ramsey, 1998)—that is, not only issues of culture, language, race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, but also issues of inclusion of young children with special educational needs in general early childhood classrooms, and issues of environmentalism and consumerism. All of this work heightened the awareness of many early childhood educators regarding the effects of culture on human development and learning, and of the role of culturally and individually shaped values on the processes of curriculum development and implementation.

Increasing attention to multiculturalism thus called into question the meaning of "appropriate" as the concept was being used in DAP. What was appropriate practice in one culture might not be appropriate in another (Mallory & New, 1994). Moreover, the previously widely accepted descriptions of child development were seen in a new light as they began to be examined through the lenses of cultural influences on children's development and learning. Rather than a background to children's emerging development, culture was beginning to be viewed by some psychologists and early educators as a foreground that leads to development. Intersecting with these visions was renewed focus on the work of a Russian psychologist whose research was embedded in the Marxist tradition of understanding human development as an artifact of society.

Vygotsky and the Social Construction of Knowledge

Due to a number of political and historical circumstances, the work of Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) was not disseminated widely in Russia or in the rest of the world during the first half of the twentieth century. By the early 1960s, however, there was enough interest in it in the United States to support translation of some of his writings into English (Vygotsky, 1962/1986). Interpretation of Vygotsky's findings has subsequently taken different forms in Russia and the United States, due to fundamental differences in the orientations of psychological studies and visions of the aims of education in the two countries. In the United States, several major features of the work have become salient and are beginning to affect the theory and practice of early childhood education (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Lee, 1992a, 1992b).

Although Vygotsky's theory of development resembles behaviorism in the sense that he saw the external environment, specifically society or culture, as the stimulus for development, he is considered a constructivist in the way he theorized about the nature of human knowledge (Lee, 1992a). Unlike Piaget and others who saw human development as pro-

ceeding in stages through the emergence of an internal schedule of maturation within the individual child in interaction with the physical and social environment, Vygotsky understood development to proceed without stages and through a social (rather than individual) process. Learning is mediated through the social phenomenon of language, and learning leads development instead of the other way around (Vygotsky, 1962/1986). Knowledge is thus understood to be a social construction, deeply embedded in the historical and cultural contexts of people's lives.

Especially influential in this process of learning and knowledge construction is the role of adults (teachers) and more capable peers, who through language and other social communication systems can move children from what they are able to do and understand on their own to a higher level of performance. Vygotsky called this psychological "space" in which influence can occur the "zone of proximal development" (now commonly referred to as the "ZPD").

In recent years, broad implications have been drawn from Vygotsky's research to early childhood curriculum development and implementation. Highlighted among these are the importance of social contexts (especially the contexts of family and community) as sources of learning and development, and the role of language in development (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Williams, 1991). Strategies such as use of the ZPD and "leading activities" that involve language growth and expansion for children of different ages, and especially the use of play to foster development, are recommended parts of Vygotskian-influenced early childhood curricula (Bodrova & Leong, 1996). These considerations, as well as the convergence of concern about cultural appropriateness in early childhood teaching practice, gave further impetus to the controversy surrounding DAP.

Toward Reconceptualization of the Field

Keeping apace with the multicultural movement and the introduction of Vygotskian theory, a group of early childhood theorists, researchers, and practitioners has established new lines of curriculum inquiry from critical, postmodern, poststructural, and feminist perspectives (Cannella, 1997; Kessler, 1990; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Mallory & New, 1994). Known as the "early childhood reconceptualists," this group has begun to raise issues of continued disenfranchisement of some populations from the early childhood educational systems, continued inequity in distribution of resources, and continued lack of recognition of the role values play in curriculum development and enactment.

In the mid-1990s, responding to critiques from this and other groups as well as to its own internal processes, NAEYC reassessed its position state-

ment and issued a revision (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) incorporating greater attention to the role of families and culture in children's development and highlighting the role of the teacher as decision maker and curriculum developer. The revision did retain the idea of "appropriate" versus "inappropriate" practices, however, and debate has continued regarding that formulation.

CONCLUSION

What appears to be a central motif in the ongoing conversation regarding early childhood curriculum is the notion that children's knowledge is not only individually but socially constructed. For that reason, culture and belief systems also play a role in what and how children learn and must further expand the notion of the whole child. Knowledge in these areas is acquired largely through the children's observation of their society and playful imitation of the expectations and ways of life that they see around them, and their processing of these through language.

Thus, the image of the whole child and arguments for the roles of process and play in promoting development and learning remain vital today; and the themes that have characterized early childhood program formulations continue to reveal themselves in curriculum research. Opposing ideas introduced in some periods of innovation and exploration have served to sharpen the distinctive viewpoint—that the young child should be approached as an integrated being—permeating the field. The chapters that follow explore that viewpoint both within subject areas and across the themes traced in our brief history. The fundamental curriculum questions and the approaches to their possible resolution provided by each author suggest directions for future early childhood curriculum development.

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